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## Consumer Health Services and Collections for Hispanics: An Introduction

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**ABSTRACT.** Hispanics are the fastest growing minority population in the United States today. Providing health information services to Hispanic patients and their family members can be challenging because of diversity. Library staff should be familiar with the specific health care needs and sociocultural characteristics of Hispanics. This article discusses the movement toward providing culturally competent health care and identifies socioeconomic challenges and barriers to health care faced by Hispanics. Suggestions are offered for communicating with this group in the reference setting, and a selective bibliography of Internet consumer health resources available in both Spanish and English is provided.

### Introduction

Hispanics are an increasingly significant segment of the United States (U.S.) population. In 1980, Hispanics comprised approximately 6.5 percent of the U.S. population.<sup>1</sup> In 2000, Hispanics accounted for 12.0 percent of the U.S. population (excluding the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico).<sup>2</sup> The United States Census Bureau estimates that Hispanics will surpass Blacks as the largest minority group in the United States by 2010.<sup>1</sup>

The Hispanic population comes from many different countries. The Census Bureau defines Hispanics as, "those individuals who indicate their origin as Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Central or South American, or some other Hispanic origin."<sup>3</sup> The 2000 Current Population Survey (CPS) indicated that among the Hispanic population, 66.1 percent were of Mexican origin, 14.5 percent were Central and South American, 9.0 percent were Puerto Rican, 4.0 percent were Cuban, and the remaining 6.4 percent were of other Hispanic origins.<sup>2</sup>

Many terms are used to identify this aggregate of diverse individuals. Hispanics even frequently disagree on what they want to be called. Many Hispanics identify themselves by their original nationality. The U.S. government began using the term "Hispanic" in the 1970s to describe the growing Spanish-speaking population. As of 2001, the Census Bureau is using the term "Hispanic or Latino Origin" in their publications to identify this population.<sup>4</sup> For this paper, the term "Hispanic" is used because it is a term that still has wide recognition.

This paper discusses the significance of cultural competence in the health care setting, identifies socioeconomic challenges of the Hispanic population, addresses health topics of specific concern to Hispanics, and offers suggestions about communicating with this group in the reference setting. Finally, a select list of Spanish and English language Internet resources is provided that can be used as a starting point for serving the consumer health information needs of Hispanic patrons. This paper is not intended to be an all-inclusive guide to serving the Hispanic population. The concepts presented here pertain to the Hispanic population in general

and should serve as a valuable introductory resource.

## **Cultural Competence**

Growing minority populations are placing increasing demands on the U.S. health care system. These growing populations demand that health care providers and agencies improve their cultural competence in addressing the specific health care needs of minorities. The American Medical Association (AMA), as part of their Cultural Competence Initiative, published the *Cultural Competence Compendium*, a comprehensive resource guide to organizations, agencies, and various tools focused on cultural competence.<sup>5</sup> In the *Compendium*, the AMA defines cultural competence as “the development of skills by which physicians can provide patient-centered care that takes into consideration the impact of emotional, cultural, social and psychological issues on bio-medical ailments.”<sup>6</sup> Two recent AMA policy statements, H-295.897 and H-350.975, emphasize the active role the AMA intends to play in improving the specific health care needs of Hispanics.<sup>7, 8</sup> These policy statements emphasize educational training programs that focus on providing patients with culturally competent care.

Many organizations are developing their own culturally effective initiatives. The National Center for Cultural Competence (NCCC), a collaborative project between the Georgetown University Child Development Center and several Federal government agencies, will assist agencies and their grantees in the design, implementation, and evaluation of culturally competent service delivery systems.<sup>9</sup> Delivery of culturally sensitive health care is an area of focus for the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC).<sup>10</sup> Other organizations such as the National Hispanic Medical Association and the National Association of Hispanic Nurses have been established to represent the health interests and needs of the Hispanic patient and Hispanic health care providers.<sup>11, 12</sup>

Health sciences librarians are increasingly being asked to serve the Hispanic population by providing culturally appropriate health information. In 1988, a committee of the American Library Association (ALA) outlined guidelines for developing library services and collections for Hispanics. These guidelines stressed that providing reference and information services to this population is complex given the linguistic, educational, and cultural differences that must be considered.<sup>13</sup>

## **Socioeconomic Factors**

Hispanics encounter many barriers that prevent or discourage them from seeking traditional medical care. Language, cultural differences, and economic circumstances affect how Hispanics engage the health care system and influence the type of care they receive. Unfortunately, when Hispanics do utilize traditional medical services, these encounters are often frustrating and counter-productive. Some of the challenges Hispanics confront are:

- *Communication problems and the lack of bilingual care.* Language problems are one of the most frequently cited barriers to receiving quality care for limited English-speaking patients.<sup>14</sup> The lack of bilingual care and communication problems can result in inaccurate medical histories, diagnostic errors, and misunderstanding regarding diagnosis and treatment.
- *Simpatia and respeto.* These cultural values influence the Hispanic community's use of

traditional medical services. *Simpatia* describes the importance of being polite and maintaining a pleasant disposition in stressful situations. *Respeto* refers to the tendency of Hispanics to view the physician as an authority figure who should be respected. They, in turn, expect the physician to treat them with respect.<sup>14</sup> When physicians are non-committal and distant in their interactions with patients, many Hispanics view this as negative behavior.

- *Lack of health insurance.* In 1999, 33.4 percent of Hispanics in the United States did not have health insurance; this compares with 11 percent of the White population and 21.2 percent of Blacks who did not have health insurance during this same period.<sup>15</sup> Individuals who lack health insurance are less likely to see a physician for preventive care, more likely to use emergency rooms instead of clinics, and more likely to put off seeing a doctor. Using health services in this way can lead to more expensive health care and overall increases in health care costs.<sup>16</sup>
- *Perceived discrimination based on the method of payment for services rendered.* A common perception is that patients who pay with cash or have private insurance are treated before those receiving government assistance.<sup>17</sup>
- *Economic factors.* Income figures for 2000 indicate that 22.8 percent of Hispanics lived in poverty in the United States, while 7.7 percent of non-Hispanic Whites lived in poverty.<sup>2</sup> Consequently, Hispanics are more likely to postpone seeking medical care because they cannot afford to pay for it.
- *Illiteracy and lack of education.* The 2000 CPS indicated that 27.3 percent of Hispanics 25 years old or older had less than a 9th grade education. Only 10.6 percent of the Hispanic population had a bachelor's or graduate degree from a college. In comparison, 28.1 percent of non-Hispanic whites had a bachelor's or graduate degree.<sup>2</sup> Many Hispanics have literacy problems with English and Spanish language materials. One report indicates that 50 percent of Hispanics are affected by literacy problems.<sup>18</sup> Consequently, many Hispanics are unable to read complicated medical forms or patient education materials written for persons with stronger language skills.
- *Lack of health literacy.* The National Health Education Standards define health literacy as, "the capacity of an individual to obtain, interpret, and understand basic health information and services and the competence to use such information and services in ways that enhance health."<sup>19</sup> Groups with the highest prevalence of chronic disease and the greatest need for health care have the least ability to read and comprehend information needed to function as patients.<sup>20</sup> Poor health literacy is associated with poorer health, higher health care costs and higher health care use.
- *A complex health care system.* Many Hispanics are not familiar with the system of referring patients to specialists, the idea of having to have prescriptions written for medications, HMOs, or public programs such as Medicaid.<sup>21</sup> The overall process of accessing medical treatment can be confusing.
- *Time.* Long waits in clinics, transportation problems, and getting time off work for a medical appointment can be difficult.<sup>22</sup> These roadblocks cause many in the Hispanic community to delay seeking medical attention.
- *Preference for home remedies.* Home remedies are culturally accepted, take less time, and are less expensive than traditional medical care. This preference can be explained by the traditional health beliefs of Hispanics and by their dissatisfaction with the complex health care system in the United States.<sup>21</sup>

## Communicating with Hispanic

Some Hispanics coming to the library seeking health information will be proficient in English; many will not be or they will be more comfortable communicating in Spanish. A survey of the literature to learn more about communicating with this population in a health care setting revealed the following general suggestions.<sup>23-26</sup>

- *Family cohesiveness is important.* Because of this, expect to see family and friends in the library together. Children may accompany their parents and act as translators.
- *The health care of children takes priority.* Because of this, pediatric health care issues may be one reason for their trip to the library.
- *Don't assume all Hispanics speak Spanish.* Ask the patron if he/she prefers to speak/read Spanish or English. Many Hispanics can understand written English better than they can speak it, especially if they are nervous.
- *Use your "less-than-perfect" Spanish.* Speaking even a little Spanish may encourage these patrons to use their less-than-perfect English. If possible, consult other staff members who are more proficient in Spanish.
- *Use interpreters when possible.* If your institution offers interpreter services, contact them for assistance or referrals.
- *Use a dictionary.* Don't forget to consult a Spanish-English/English-Spanish dictionary if you are having trouble understanding the patron.
- *Respect the patron.* Refer to the patron formally whenever possible. Use the formal phrase for "you," usted (oos-tehd), when speaking Spanish to adult patrons. Example: "Como esta usted?" (how are you?).
- *Convey warmth.* Maintain eye contact with the patron and make them feel comfortable in the library setting.
- *Keep it simple.* Ask one question at a time during the reference interview. Wait for an answer. Make sure you understand the response before asking another question.
- *Avoid jargon.* Try not to use technical health jargon and acronyms.
- *Religion is important.* Religion plays a prominent part in the Hispanic culture. Keep this in mind when discussing potentially difficult topics such as sexually transmitted diseases, cancer, or even death.

## Recommended Resources

A review of the literature shows that Hispanics have a high incidence of AIDS, diabetes, cardiovascular disease, liver disease, and cervical cancer. Other areas of concern include maternal/child health, alcohol abuse, and domestic violence.<sup>25-28</sup> The following resource list is selective, focuses on these specific health concerns, and meets the following criteria:

- *Availability.* Most materials are easily ordered over the phone or are available via Web sites.
- *Language.* Materials are generally available in Spanish with an English equivalent.

- *Audience.* Resources are generally written for consumers. Some higher-level resources are included to support the varied educational levels of our target population. Specific resources for children and adolescents and specific reading levels are noted when possible.
- *Authority.* Sources are authoritative and supported by a reputable organization, publisher, agency, or institution.
- *Timeliness.* Internet sites must be regularly updated, with active URLs and links. Print resources generally have publication dates between 1996 and 2001.

Resources included in our bibliography were found by searching government publications including directories, Internet search engines, related links at visited Web sites, medical databases, and newsletters from organizations such as the Medical Library Association Consumer Health Section. Sites are listed by subject areas, beginning with general sites.

### ***General***

#### **American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (AACAP)**

**<<http://www.aacap.org>>**

Provides “Facts for Families” handouts at their Web site. The handouts, developed by the AACAP, provide concise and up-to-date information on issues that affect children, teenagers, and their families. Handouts are available in English, Spanish, German, and French. More than 150 handouts are available on subjects ranging from bedwetting to childcare, from learning disabilities to lead poisoning. The handouts are provided as a public service and may be duplicate and distributed free of charge as long as the AACAP is properly credited and no profit is gained from its use.

#### **American Academy of Family Physicians**

**<<http://familydoctor.org>>**

This Web site provides handouts on specific health problems, family health facts, drug information, herbal and alternative remedies, a listing of family physicians and practices with Web sites on familydoctor.org, and self-care flowcharts that provide advice on what you can treat at home and when you should call a doctor. Some of the handouts and the family health facts are available in English and in Spanish. Information can be printed from their Web site and distributed if it is used for nonprofit educational uses. All of the information within familydoctor.org has been written and reviewed by physicians and patient education professionals at the American Academy of Family Physicians. The information is reviewed and updated regularly.

#### **CDC En Espanol (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)**

**<<http://www.cdc.gov/Spanish>>**

CDC En Espanol provides health information in Spanish for health care providers and consumers. The information is tailored to the needs of the Hispanic population and is not a translation of the English language Web site.

**Channing L. Bete Co., Inc.**  
<<http://www.Chaning-bete.com>>

Channing Bete offers Spanish language pamphlets and brochures on many subjects. The pamphlets are available in several styles and with varying degrees of reading difficulty. Pamphlets and brochures can be ordered by phone, fax, mail, or e-mail.

**ETR Associates**  
<<http://www.etr.org>>

Provides over sixty Spanish language and bilingual pamphlets on subjects such as HIV/AIDS, prenatal care, baby care, violence prevention, sexually transmitted diseases, and alcohol and drug problems.

**GlobalHealth2000**  
<<http://www.GlobalHealth2000.com>>

Provides health information in ten languages for health care professionals, patients, and health care consumers. Registration is required, but there is no charge to register. GlobalHealth provides breaking medical news, access to full-text articles, and access to MEDLINE, AIDSLINE, and CANCERLIT.

**Healthfinder**  
<<http://www.healthfinder.gov>>

In 1999, an Espanol section was added to the “just for you” area of this popular consumer health Web site. Information is available on topics such as diabetes, cancer, and preventative health care.

**Journeyworks Publishing**  
<<http://www.journeyworks.com>>

Provides a variety of Spanish language publications on subjects including pregnancy and prenatal care, mammography, sexually transmitted diseases, smoking and smoking cessation. Journeyworks strives to make their Spanish language pamphlets culturally appropriate. Materials are geared toward a low literacy audience. Reading level for many of the pamphlets is included with the pamphlet descriptions at the Journeyworks Web site.

**Krames Health & Safety Education (A Division of StayWell)**  
<<http://www.krames.com>>

Provides for a fee more than 300 Spanish language brochures and pamphlets on a wide range of subjects. Spanish language products are written by individuals who are part of the Spanish-speaking community and reviewed by individuals from Mexico, South America, and the Caribbean to ensure that the information is clear and culturally appropriate. Krames On-Demand, a print-on-demand patient education software program provides 450 information resources in

Spanish. Most of the information in Krames On-Demand is written at the sixth grade level.

**McKinley Health Center, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign**

**<<http://www.mckinley.uiuc.edu/multiculturalhealth/index.html>>**

Provides handouts on twenty-five subjects in eight languages, including Spanish. Samples of some handouts can be viewed at their Web site. Materials are copyrighted. Camera-ready master copies of the handouts, with permission to make duplicates, are available for purchase.

**MEDLINEplus**

**<<http://medlineplus.gov>>**

MEDLINEplus, from the National Library of Medicine, provides information and links to information on over 400 health topics including more than 9,000 prescription and non-prescription medications, clinical trials information, and information about doctors, dentists, and hospitals. Information is available in English, Spanish, and other languages.

**National Center for Farmworker Health**

**<<http://www.ncfh.org>>**

This site provides some low literacy, bilingual information resources for individuals who speak English or Spanish. Some of the subjects covered include healthy eating, diabetes, high blood pressure, and family planning. These materials may be downloaded free of charge. Additional bilingual materials can be ordered from the National Center for Farmworker Health.

**National Council of La Raza (NCLR)**

**<<http://www.nclr.org>>**

The National Council of La Raza, a private, nonprofit organization, was established to reduce poverty and discrimination, and improve life opportunities for Hispanic Americans. Information about many issues confronting the Hispanic population in the U.S. can be found at this Web site. Some full-text health information is available at this site; additional health information can be ordered from NCLR. Links to other Web sites are provided.

**NOAH: New York Online Access to Health**

**<<http://www.noah-health.org/>>**

The goal of NOAH is to provide the health care consumer with links to quality health information in English and Spanish. Medical librarians review the links to insure the material is current, accurate, and objective.

**Ohio State University Medical Center Patient Education Collection**  
<<http://www.osu.edu/units/osuhosp/patedu/patedu.htm>>

Handouts, many in Spanish, are available on a broad range of subjects including cancer, cardiovascular conditions, diabetes, and maternal/child care. Handouts are written by university medical center faculty and staff and go through a rigorous review process. Diagrams and images are available on most handouts. Reading level is eighth grade or lower.

**United States Food and Drug Administration**  
<<http://www.fda.gov>>

The FDA provides brochures in English and Spanish on a variety of subjects from healthy eating and weight loss to the proper use of medications. The language and drawings used in some brochures present the information in an easy-to-read format. Brochures are available online. Bulk copies can be ordered from the FDA. A CD-ROM of the English and Spanish Easy-To-Read brochures is also available.

**University of Utah Health Sciences Center**  
<<http://www.med.utah.edu/pated>>

A collaborative effort between the Spencer S. Eccles Health Sciences Library and the University of Utah Health Sciences Center, this site provides patient handouts in English and Spanish. Many subjects are covered including diabetes, cardiology, cancer, obstetrics and gynecology, and nutrition. Most of the information is written at the sixth grade level.

**Well-Connected**  
<<http://www.well-connected.com>>

Well-Connected provides handouts on more than 100 different health subjects. Information is comprehensive and updated regularly. The reports are written by experienced medical writers and reviewed for accuracy and relevance by a board of physicians at Harvard Medical School and Massachusetts General Hospital. Print and Web format subscriptions are available for English language handouts; Web subscriptions are available for the Spanish language handouts. The reading level for these handouts is ninth grade.

***AIDS***

**AIDS Clinical Trials Information Service (ACTIS)**  
<<http://www.actis.org>>

This Public Health Service project provides current information on federally and privately funded clinical trials for AIDS/HIV patients. From the Web site, users can find current information regarding vaccine and drug clinical trials as well as answers to FAQs and links to other government services. The toll-free number puts callers in touch with bilingual health specialists who can search AIDS databases and provide them with up-to-date trial information.



**American Social Health Association (ASHA)**

**<<http://www.ashastd.org>>**

Provides reliable, easy-to-read information on sexually transmitted diseases. Spanish-language information is field-tested for cultural sensitivity. The reading level for some of the pamphlets is listed on their Web site.

**The Body: An AIDS and HIV Information Resource**

**<<http://www.thebody.com>>**

From the Body Health Resources Corporation, The Body offers an easy-to-use Web site in both English and Spanish. The informal style of this site makes it appropriate for younger readers. The Body claims to provide HIV/AIDS information on over 250 topics. The search engine supports Spanish language terms. The section focused on Spanish information offers an “ask an expert” service as well as links to fact sheets, directories, and a Spanish language discussion forum.

**CDC National Prevention Information Network (NPIN)**

**<<http://www.cdcnpin.org>>**

A comprehensive source of free information on HIV/AIDS, STDs, and TB. Materials include fact sheets, brochures, reports, and newsletters. Many materials are available in Spanish. Resources can be ordered online, over the phone, or through the mail. Health information specialists at the NPIN are available via phone or e-mail to answer questions, provide referrals, or offer technical assistance in Spanish.

***Alcoholism*****Alcoholics Anonymous/Al-Anon/Alateen**

**<<http://www.alcoholics-anonymous.org/>> or**

**<<http://www.al-anon.org>>**

In addition to the obvious publications regarding the Twelve Steps and membership in Alcoholics Anonymous, many additional easy-to-read Spanish publications regarding alcoholism or living with an alcoholic family member are available from their Web sites. Resources for adults and teens are offered.

**National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information**

**<<http://www.health.org>>**

From the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, this service provides several resources on alcohol and drug abuse prevention and treatment for the Hispanic population. Most National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) publications are available in Spanish/English from the Clearinghouse. Fact sheets, related links, and other resources are also available from their Web site. Their phone service is staffed by Spanish and English-speaking information professionals.

## ***Cancer***

### **American Cancer Society**

**<<http://www.cancer.org>>**

The American Cancer Society's Cancer Resource Center provides information regarding cancer prevention, detection, and treatment. Most publications are available in Spanish. Publications are available on the Spanish language version of their Web site or may be ordered. Spanish-speaking information specialists are also available to answer questions over the phone.

### **Cancer Research Foundation of America (CRFA)**

**<<http://www.preventcancer.org>>**

The Spanish language versions of many CRFA educational materials are free to individuals or organizations. Brochures and fact sheets are available from their Web site or can be ordered over the phone.

### **CancerNet en Espanol (From the National Cancer Institute)**

**<[http://cancernet.nci.nih.gov/pdq\\_sp.html](http://cancernet.nci.nih.gov/pdq_sp.html)>**

As with the English version, the Spanish service provides patients with current information from the PDQ database on types of cancer, treatment, clinical trials, genetics, risk factors, and more.

## ***Communication Aids***

### **Baja Books**

**<<http://www.speedylanguage.com>>**

Provides medical phrase books in English and Spanish for health care workers. The books include phrases for greeting patients, basic anatomical terms, examination questions, surgery preparation, labor and delivery, and abdominal, breathing and diabetic disorders. There is a charge for materials.

### **Crestwood Communication Aids, Inc.**

**<<http://www.communicationaids.com>>**

Provides kits for individuals with communication problems. Provides a basic means of communicating with individuals who have difficulty expressing their needs orally and for those who cannot be understood by others. Cards are multilingual. They include a picture and the English word on one side of the card. On the back side of the card is the word in English, Spanish, German, French, and Italian. There is a charge for materials.

**Picture of Health**

**<<http://members.aol.com/pichealth/cards/poh.html>>**

Provides sets of medical communication cards that help in communicating with non-verbal and non-English speaking patients. Provides cards on subjects including symptoms, patient instructions, and pain levels. Materials can be ordered for a fee by telephone, through the Web site, or by mail.

***Diabetes*****American Diabetes Association**

**<<http://www.diabetes.org>>**

Provides information about many aspects of living with diabetes. Some Spanish language information can be found at their Web site. Additional Spanish language brochures and pamphlets may be ordered.

**National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases (NIDDK)**

**<<http://www.niddk.nih.gov/health/diabetes/diabetes.htm>>**

Easy-to-read English and Spanish language publications can be printed from the Web site or ordered from the National Diabetes Information Clearinghouse. Easy-to-read publications are written at a fourth-sixth grade reading level.

***Heart*****American Heart Association**

**<<http://www.americanheart.org/>>**

Many AHA Publications are available in Spanish. Many resources are bilingual and most have a readability level, as defined by the AHA, of either “Very Easy” or “Quick and Easy.” Fact sheets and brochures on such topics as heart attack signs, controlling high blood pressure, and weight management are available online or through their Fulfillment Center.

**National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute**

**<<http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/heart/index.htm>>**

Provides many educational materials in Spanish. Booklets and fact sheets on topics such as cardiovascular risk factors and improving blood pressure or cholesterol levels are available. Materials are accessible online or they may be ordered via phone or mail for a small fee.

## **Maternal/Child**

### **American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG)**

**<<http://www.acog.com>>**

Provides Spanish language pamphlets on many subjects including prenatal care, labor and delivery, and postpartum care. The Spanish language pamphlets have English equivalents. The average reading level is sixth-eighth grade. Pamphlets must be ordered.

### **La Leche League International**

**<<http://www.lalecheleague.org>>**

La Leche League International's mission is to support breastfeeding through mother-to-mother support, encouragement, and information and education. Materials in English and in other languages are available at their Web site and in their catalog. The Web site provides collections of articles, FAQs, and other materials in English and Spanish.

### **March of Dimes Spanish Language Web Site**

**<<http://www.nacersano.org>>**

This Web site is not a corresponding site to the English site. It has been adapted to meet the specific needs and nuances of the Spanish-speaking population. The goal of Nacersano, which means born healthy, is to provide information about pregnancy, birth defects, and infant health to women of childbearing age and to share background information about the March of Dimes.

### **National Women's Health Information Center**

**<<http://www.4women.gov/>>**

Provides links to hundreds of low literacy and Spanish language resources dealing with many aspects of women's health. Women's health professionals have reviewed the content for quality and relevance.

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